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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 0045

RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ PRIORITY

RUEHNG/AMCONSUL NOGALES PRIORITY

RUEHNL/AMCONSUL NUEVO LAREDO PRIORITY 0001

RUEHTM/AMCONSUL TIJUANA PRIORITY 0001

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISTANBUL 000475

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2007

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ZEYNEL ERDEM DISCUSSES GULENIST SCHOOLS

REF: ISTANBUL 353

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL DEBORAH K JONES FOR REASON 1.5 (B)

¶1. (C) Zeynel Erdem, a wealthy local businessman and self-described 'advocate for America' (please protect) used a May 31 appointment with CG to raise two cases of Fetullah Gulen (FG) adherents who'd recently been barred from entering the United States. (See reftel for more detail on Gulen and the FG movement.) Describing his experience with the FG organization and the Gulen schools network, Erdem said he visited Gulen in Pennsylvania in mid-May and reported his health appeared to be good. Erdem is aware of the problematic nature of Fetullah Gulen's current visa situation, and told CG he believed the "highest levels" of the U.S. government were also aware of this case and that Gulen's immigration status would be given favorable consideration when a decision is ultimately made.

¶2. (C) Erdem noted the FG organization operates 18 schools at the primary and secondary level in Turkey's Southeast, the region from which Erdem's family originates. His family foundation provides tens of thousands of dollars in financial support on a regular basis to Gulen schools operating in that area. He explained that although he has always requested and received a makbuz (receipt) for payment, many donors do not and FG schools do not appear to routinely issue receipts to donors. FG schools typically solicit funds directly from local worthies. This may be supplemented by a central charitable giving mechanism. We cautioned that charity business practices, in particular accounting for incoming and outgoing financial donations, had come under great scrutiny in recent years. In order to avoid the perception of wrongdoing it would be wise for FG-affiliated charities to strengthen their business practices and make them more transparent.

¶3. (C) Erdem did not describe himself as a FG "follower" per se (i.e. he does not view Fetullah Gulen as his religious leader) but believes that there are over 5 million FG followers in Turkey. The number of Turkish donors is several times higher in his estimation. FG followers are generally well-disposed to the United States and the USG, largely because Fetullah Gulen currently lives in the United States and the FG organization has been successful in establishing 'over 70' schools there. If the USG were to deport or otherwise force Fetullah Gulen to depart the United States, this reservoir of good will would rapidly dry up, Erdem argued.

¶4. (C) Erdem cautioned that he was not aware of the current state of the relationship between PM Erdogan and Fetullah

Gulen but believed it was not close. Several years earlier he had attempted to broker a telephone conversation between the two, but was rebuffed by Gulen. In his opinion, FM Gul and former Interior Minister Abdulkadir Aksu have a much closer relationship with Gulen.

JONES